

# **South Asia Labour Conference 2014: LAHORE**

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## **STRENGTHENING LABOUR MARKET INFORMATION SYSTEM AND SUPPORTING EVIDENCE BASED LABOUR POLICY DEVELOPMENT IN THE REGION**

By

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Lahore

April, 2014

## ABSTRACT<sup>1</sup>

*South Asia houses one fifth of human population and the developing economies of the region are, therefore, exceedingly dependent on the manpower demand in the domestic as well as international labour market. Hence, the challenges to determine the skills demanded and train the human resources accordingly especially the intending emigrant workers. Economic integration with the regional and global economies is indispensable for the wellbeing of the masses in the current times. In order to optimally exploit the opportunities available or expected to accrue in future, labour market intelligence and evidence based policy formulation are preconditions to face the challenges and bridge the gaps. So there is a need to strengthen labour market information systems and support evidence based labour policy development at sub-national, national and regional levels. This paper summarizes a situation analysis of the labour market data collection, analysis and dissemination practices in Pakistan with a view to identify the best practices for further sharing with the regional stakeholders. It further examines the evolution of labour market analysis as an alternative approach to manpower planning, the good practices of the LMI systems in the developed countries and South Asian Countries with a view to improve Labour Market Information and Analysis in Pakistan. In the end, the paper identifies gaps in LMIS and proposes way forward to bridge the gaps.*

**Key words:** Development, Labour Market, LMIS, Pakistan Statistics

## 1. INTRODUCTION

The Labour Market Information (LMI) means the statistical (quantitative) and non-statistical (qualitative) information concerning labour market actors and their environment as well as information concerning labour market institutions, policies and regulations that serve the needs of users and have been collected through the application of accepted methodologies and practices to the largest possible extent

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<sup>1</sup> The authors appreciate the views and comments of the expert from the ILO and Mr. Saeed Ahmed Nawaz.

(Sparreboom, 1999). Whereas, he defines a labour market information system (LMIS) as a set of institutional arrangements, procedures and mechanisms that are designed to produce labour market information.

The LMIS may be used as an efficient and effective tool to determine the employment levels, skills demanded and workforce available, assess the training needs and formulate human resource development strategy. It can be optimally employed to address the systemic and non-systemic unemployment, reduce poverty and promote the decent work agenda. Persistent collaboration among the stakeholders on demand and supply side is necessary to build a robust LMIS to continuously examine the flows of labour market dynamics. The scale and scope of the assignment make the government intervention necessary to develop and disseminate LMI. Main users of LMI data and analyses may include the policy makers, investors and project managers needing to know the employment situation and employability trends, prevailing wage levels, occupational and skills matching for their initiatives and projects.

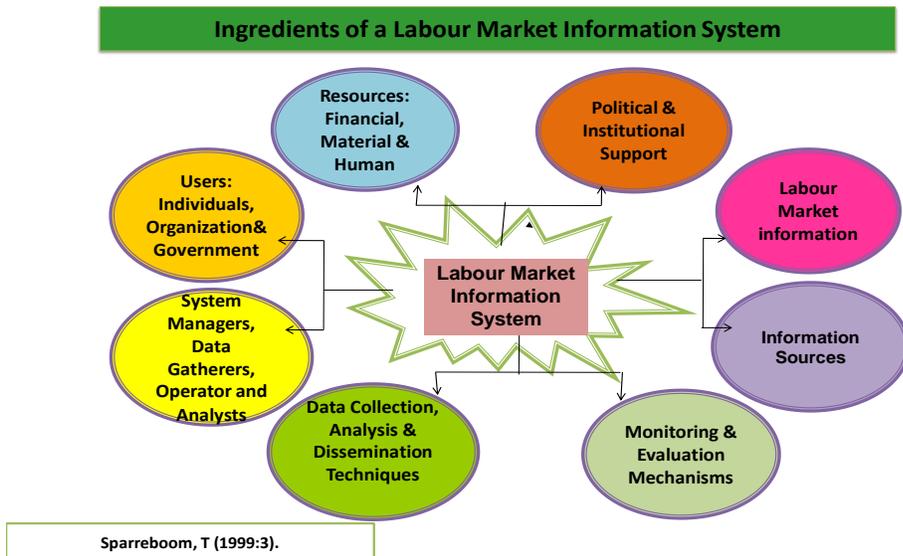
Decisions may go wrong or incur heavy financial costs due to lack of timely and reliable LMI system. The information generated by different actors in the labour market is fed into, synthesized and analyzed by the LMIS for proper sharing amongst the stakeholders on the supply and demand side of information with the employers interacting as the source as well as recipient of the information. Planning and implementing effective employment and training programs requires a proper understanding of labour market conditions, ongoing trends and perceived as well as real structural changes. Accessibility to the most up-to-date and timely labour market information and analysis (LIMA) is dependent upon a comprehensive system of LIMA in the country, in the form of publications or online information in accord with internationally accepted concepts and key labour market indicators. The most important role of the employment planners is to correct distortions and imbalances caused by structural labour market changes. Therefore, the availability of real-time accurate information may portray a precise picture of the situation in the labour market for

initiating corrective measures, if needed and ensure stability and lasting equilibrium in the domestic and regional markets.

### **1.1 LMI and Economic Development**

Appropriate information about human resource available and gross plus per capita income of a country have a great significance for the development process of that state. This information on level of employment, allocation of labour between sectors and occupations, retrenchments, vacancies and job seekers, quality of jobs being created, social costs of the transition process, changes in income levels and matching of businesses with the people. The relationship between the economic activity and the labour market situation is so direct that labour market intelligence shapes the economic decisions of the stakeholders. Development performance appraisal cannot be completed without analyzing the indicators of labour market viz income and employment in the analysis of the firms and economy as a whole.

Labour markets and labour policies in South Asian Region have rapidly changed during the recent past. Many countries of the region have introduced legislative reforms in tandem with a striking range of labour market programs and projects. These initiatives flowed from regional integration adopted to increase the flow of trade and investments in the wake of globalization. Examination of labour markets and policy interventions that shifted from long-term concerns to short term assessments has become increasingly complex in view of the changing methodologies in rapidly developing economies. The introduction of new technologies, new production systems, changed work patterns and export oriented processes has a strong confluence on the labour markets. Modern initiatives have triggered a process of evolution having striking similarities and certain commonalities in the developing economies of the region enabling the sharing of experiences as to how should the systems be prioritized and designed. South Asian Countries are, hence, in the process of the constructing their LMIS according to their labour market dynamics. The ingredients of a typical LMIS and their interaction are as follows:



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## 1.2 Evolution of Labour Market Analysis as an alternative approach to Manpower Planning

Frans Meijers (1998:74) argues that the need for information in an industrial society remarkably differs from that of a post-industrial society. In the industrial society the economic situation (especially the job structure) was very stable so there was little need for such information. In the post-industrial society, the need for LMI was enormous because, the demand for skills/qualifications changed fundamentally and constantly. The manpower planning was in accordance with a development paradigm, which allowed for strong involvement of the government in the economy, and a focus on the “formal” part of the labour market (Sparreboom, Theo and Marcus Powell: 2009). A number of factors have contributed to the gradual paradigm shift from manpower planning to human resource development, such as the drastic policy changes in privatisation, deregulation and liberalisation of the economies. After years or even decades of strong involvement of the states in the economy and the pursuit of inward looking strategies a radical shift came into labour market analysis. An instructive idea of new approaches to examine labour markets was elaborated below in the table by Psacharopoulos (1991).

<b>Concepts that are becoming relatively less important.</b>	<b>Concepts that have gained importance.</b>
Planning	Analysis/ Policy making
Manpower	Labour force
Counting heads	Measuring wages
Firm labour surveys	Household surveys
Opinion surveys	Tracer studies
Occupational profile	Educational profile
Public sector only	Private and informal sector
Production efficiency only	Equity/poverty
Technical efficiency	Economic efficiency
Output-labour relationships	Cost-benefit analysis
Fixed wages	Flexible wages
Manpower needs	Labour supply and demand
Skill-specific training	General training
School-based training	Firm-based training
Free education/training	Cost-recovery/user fees
Public education/training	Private education/training
Filling long-term skill gaps	Correcting present labour market distortions

**Table 1.** From planning to analysis (Psacharopoulos (1991)).

The changes illustrated new emphasis on labour market analysis, as opposed to manpower planning, as well as the shift from a long term technical approach of the labour market towards short term supply/ demand imbalances concerns.

The South Asian region has not experienced occurrence of such radical industrial revolution but it is definitely affected by the principal forces of change; globalization of competition, world economic recession, technological advancements and demographic changes in the structure of labour force. Besides, technological revolution and emergence of new axis of economic powers in the world lead to realize the paradigm shift. In these circumstances, relationship became more direct between the education

and training systems and the labour market. Occupational structures changed rapidly, the professional knowledge and skills could easily be transferred. Planning, even for short-term courses, can be done well in advance, and there is a need to make projections about the future demands of occupations. As a result of privatization of public sector and shift from formal to informal economy serious challenge to the whole process of manpower planning surfaced for notice. Moreover, the contraction of public sector as a major employment provider and the development of market economies gave impetus to the need for a different planning approach wherein the results of labour market analysis as well as market based signals of supply and demand for skills are made available to stakeholders responsible for the formulation and implementation of manpower and employment policies and programs.

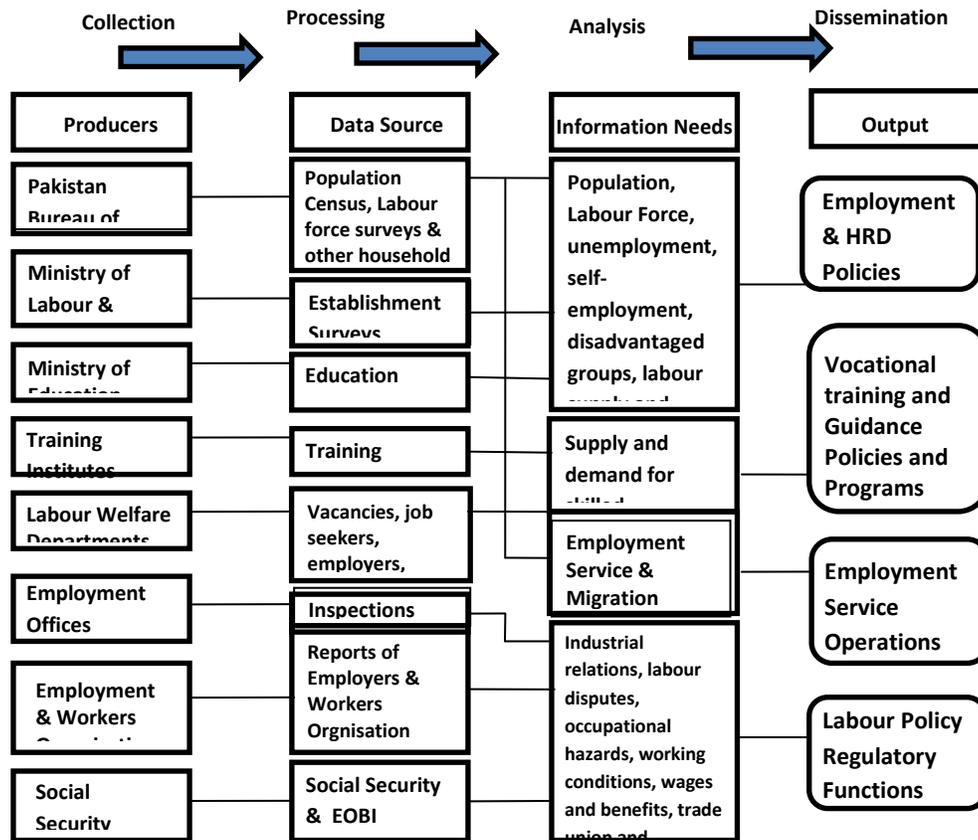
## **2. DEVELOPMENT OF THE LMIS IN PAKISTAN**

Pakistan started with Central Statistical Office (CSO) in 1950 as an Attached Department of Economic Affairs Division. Pakistan Statistical Year Book, an annual publication of the Federal Bureau of Statistics was published in 1952. Since then statistical system was reviewed from time to time and the CSO was upgraded to a full-fledged Statistics Division in 1972. Government of Pakistan has established Pakistan Bureau of Statistics (PBS) by merging Federal Bureau of Statistics, the Population Census Organization, the Agriculture Census Organization and the Technical Wing of Statistics Division. The PBS is responsible for coordinating all statistical activities in the country and is a major source of official statistics. It undertakes various surveys that provide information on the labour market. The surveys are conducted primarily at the national level including regions, disaggregated by urban/ rural and male/ female. It collects information on selected indicators determined by data availability, national development goals and international comparability. Some indicators are available on regular basis while others are compiled only on ad-hoc basis. The PBS also conducts surveys on socio-economic conditions such as the Household Income, Consumption, and Expenditure and Welfare Monitoring Surveys. The census of establishments was also conducted for the first time in 1988<sup>2</sup>.

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<sup>2</sup>Pakistan Bureau of Statistic, Government of Pakistan.

The LMI is produced by different institutions in Pakistan, illustrated in the schematic diagram as under.



Source: ILO (1992)

Pakistan is an active member state of the International Labour Organization (ILO). The ILO Convention No. 88, 122 and Recommendation No. 122 provide for setting up of public employment services. Although not ratified by Pakistan, these conventions triggered a motivation for the establishment of the services. Moreover, the ILO Convention No. 96 duly ratified by the Government of Pakistan provided for the elimination of Fee Charging Employment Agencies by providing free Public

Employment Service. Through this ratification, the Government of Pakistan has accepted the obligation of maintenance and operation of the Employment Exchanges in country. Article 37 (b) & (c), of the Constitution of Pakistan 1973 promised to its citizens that the State would remove illiteracy and provide free and compulsory secondary education within the minimum possible period; make technical and professional education generally available and higher education equally accessible to all on the basis of merit.

The Employment Exchanges were established at district level for collection of data for future manpower planning, registration of job seekers, notification of vacancies in private and public sector, data referred for jobs, placement of job seekers and registration of essential personnel for provision of manpower from private sector to armed forces during emergencies and registration/ placement of disabled persons. A large number of people used to get them registered with these exchanges but with the passage of time the registration declined as public sector stopped dispatching information about vacancies to these exchanges and the private sector organizations changed the employment patterns by developing linkages with contractors who provided manpower to such organizations on contract basis. The governments started slashing funds so the Punjab and Khyber Pakhtunkhwa (KPK) governments downsized the institutions while the employment exchanges in Baluchistan and Sindh have been rendered inoperative.

### **3. GOOD PRACTICES IN DEVELOPED AND REGIONAL COUNTRIES OF LMI GENERATION & USE**

An overview of the current practices in generation, analysis and dissemination of LMI in regional countries reveals that the experiences of these countries with LMI differ significantly. It is still possible to identify common trends and to derive lessons from the different experiences in the region with common culture of developing economies. Most of the countries in the region are still developing or recently developed their systems. On the contrary, LMIS based on the most modern approaches and methodologies has been functioning in the developed countries.

In **Ireland** the Economic and Social Research Institute conducts a School Leavers Survey based on a national sample of school leavers who are contacted during the period of one to one and a half year after leaving school. The most recent School Leavers Survey was conducted in 2007 using a variety of approaches including the option of completing the survey questionnaire online (OECD, 2010a). **Sweden** does not collect outcomes data by surveys since it operates a central population register that attaches a Unique Identifier Code to each individual which collects a wide range of administrative data sets including education history, employment history and tax records that is used to analyze the links between VET and later labour market experiences. A number of countries outside the Nordic Region have plans to introduce similar systems (OECD, 2008b). Rich and easily accessible labour market data and information on educational options are a strength of the **Czech** VET system that has been developed for both teaching and advising staff and graduates to support them in making career choices and is based on medium-term macro-level quantitative forecasting which incorporates some qualitative elements of sectoral projections. (Cedefop: 2008).

**India** has a rich tradition and experience in the use of LMIS for employment and manpower planning. As Richter, L (1991), describing the problems and experiences of India concluded that it provided a rich observation and training ground for other developing countries. Many critiques have highlighted the problems of lack of uniformity in the use of definitions as well as delay in publishing survey reports. In **Sri Lanka**, there is Job Net, online registration of unemployed, notification of vacancies, and access of resumes to potential employers. The Tertiary and Vocational Education Commission is responsible for maintaining the LMIS of the country. In developing countries like **Nepal**, a considerable interest has been developed for promoting LMIS and the Department of Labour carries out the labour management information functions under Ministry of Labour and Employment. The system introduced in **Bhutan**, is identical to Sri Lanka, and has developed an institutional mechanism of LMIS that facilitates the youth, job seekers, unemployed and even employers. **Bangladesh** is currently working to develop its LMIS with the co-operation of the ILO as reported by Manipal City, Guilds, (ILO: 2013). **Afghanistan** is confronting a host of demographic, social and economic challenges. The Ministry of Labour Social Affairs Martyrs and

Disabled has developed an employment generation and capacity-building policy program which is at formation phase.

#### **4. LABOUR MARKET INFORMATION AND ANALYSIS IN PAKISTAN**

Labour Market Information Analysis (LMIA) is a fundamental tool to keep an eye on labour market performance for achieving productive employment and decent work for everyone. In Pakistan seminal work in this direction was started in the late 1980s with the support of the Netherlands Government and a comprehensive program was put into operation for more than six years to review LMI in the country which provided training and operationalized a computer aided LMIS that was integrated with provinces and districts. The sources of LMI were comprehensively reviewed for the first time and a detailed analysis of the country's main source of LMI; the Labour Force Survey (LFS) was undertaken. The books, specialized reports, working papers and manuals were produced. This project created a computerized time series and developed four computer software including Pakistan's first computerized LMIS. In 2006, a new project of LMIA was launched by the ILO-UNDP at the Ministry of Labour and Manpower to analyze LMI gathered at both the federal and provincial levels. Extremely useful work was completed under the Dutch project to bridge the gaps and lead the country towards an LMIS. It started working on analysis of LFS on the selected key indicators of the labour market. A national tripartite advisory panel guided the production of 'Pakistan Employment Trends' reports from 2007-2010, covering skills, women, youth, Millennium Development Goals target and other employment themes. This project ended in pursuance of the 18th Constitutional Amendment, 2010 that devolved employment and labour related functions to the provinces (Ghayur: 2014).

The TEVT Authorities in the Punjab and Sindh have established Labour Market Information Systems to support in developing Provincial Skills Strategies, promotion of competency-based training, assist in mainstreaming entrepreneurship education in TEVT Sector, promotion of apprenticeship training and strengthening linkages with industries through Industry-Institute Management Committees. Vocational training institutions are responsive to market demands and capable to operate flexibly with cost-efficiency for the benefit of their stakeholders. The TEVTA Punjab developed a Skill

LMIS with regard to skill mapping through trades/skills being offered institute-wise, enrolment by districts and enlisting district-wise industrial units by categories. It also registers employers and job seekers but the information provided on employment opportunities is rudimentary. Furthermore, it hosts a TEVTA Management Information System (MIS) and the key information and services offered are elementary. Moreover, the Punjab Vocational Training Council has a job placement office in each of its 160 vocational training centers. It also conducted a tehsil-wise skills needs assessment in 2011.

The Labour Market Information and Resource Center (LMI & RC) was established in 2011 in the Labour and Human Resource Department Punjab in order to collect and analyze available labour market data for advancing research through sharing of information; identifying future market trends and market knowledge of related fields; providing infrastructure and facilities for research promotion and dissemination of user friendly information to the public. The Center is tasked with increasing outreach to the public, to provide free and first-hand knowledge of LMI. LMI & RC in its very first report published in 2013 analyzed the trends of labour market economy, changing age structure of the labour force, urban-rural division of labour force, comparison of growth rate and participation of the female labour force, gender gaps in labour force participation, self-employed employment dimension of decent work and unemployment rate. The Centre is entrusted with the task to develop district-wise labour market information profiles and labour laws enforcement profiles. The latter will be internet-based and information will be made available online. These important initiatives in the Punjab are yet working in isolation and need institutional mechanism to synergize and reinforce their capacities to achieve best results<sup>3</sup>.

## **5. IDENTIFYING GAPS AND THE WAY FORWARD TO ADDRESS GAPS**

The LIMS is in its formative stage in Pakistan offering only moderate information regarding rural and urban and gender divide in the provinces through LFSs and population censuses. The detailed activities in localities of urban areas at district level

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<sup>3</sup> Government of the Punjab, Labour and Human Resource Department

are not available, while the available information at employment exchanges is invisible to the users. Most surveys are being conducted either after long intervals or otherwise on ad hoc approaches. These sources fall short to offer adequate information on labour supply and demand trends. Even in the aggregative form, consequential details and disaggregation are not forthcoming. Ghayur (1994:1360) observed that during the evolution period of LIMS an inadequate attention to data generation and labour market monitoring had clearly lead to a situation where desired services from a LMIS such as employment counseling, vocational guidance and employment services were not forthcoming. In fact basic data needed for undertaking such an exercise is almost non-existent. The employment exchanges, however, are undertaking such exercises but these are confined to a few activities of an insignificant nature. On the other hand, while reviewing studies on the LMIS in Pakistan, Abbink and Tejani (1991:707) observed that the initiative focused the information aspects only whereas the system aspect was left untouched. Moreover, these studies more or less presumed existence of an already operating system, which may (or may not) deliver the expected LMI.

The LMIA infrastructure in the province needs further development and strengthening so that timely and up-to-date labour market analysis can be utilized in the policy formulation. In order to properly assess employment patterns and their evolution over time, it is recommended that a provincial GDP series be developed so that the contribution of each sector to the provincial economy can be estimated. A district level representative LFS should be administered by the PBS every two years so that the labour market situation within different regions of the province can be properly assessed and relevant sub-provincial programs and strategies may be designed. Policies for promoting employment generation in the province should focus on improving the productivity of the agricultural work force through strengthened extension services and higher outlays on agricultural research and development. The livestock sub-sector, in particular, can support higher levels of employment creation through its backward and forward linkages along the production supply chain. In the urban sector, the productivity of household enterprises can be raised by the provision of business support services

including developing market linkages, credit facilities and the design and implementation of relevant technical, educational and vocational training programs.

Now, there is an increasing awareness of the role of LMI in HRD policy but new approaches still necessitate labour market planning which calls for a well-coordinated and coherent LMIS to be instituted. The Technical and Vocational Education and Training system in Pakistan is not sufficiently adapted to labour market requirements and only caters a small segment of the training needs. There is still a lot of missing information, which could be helpful in the human resource planning in Pakistan. The data regarding public service recruitment trends, foreign recruitments, retrenchments and data on the informal sector is not analyzed and shared with other potential users. The third tier of the Government has infrastructure at Union Council level that can play a vital role in providing the information on the multiple labour market scenarios. It can collect the information about local economy data with current and historical information, demographic data based on geographies, labour market data of specific sectors and occupations, training opportunities available for formal and non-formal trainings and immigrant labour force signals.

The existing LMIS in the country faces a number of challenges which mainly arise due to the large work force in scattered demographic areas and involvement of different agencies in generating labour market information. Most of these organizations work in isolation and pose major challenge to collate the information in one place. It is essential for LMI to be collected in a coordinated manner so that the signals should be timely and disseminated accurately.

The aging of the baby-boom cohorts into youth bulge is a familiar aspect of labour market change in Pakistan. Youth is a key asset to any society that needs guidance to equip them with the required skills and education giving them decent work opportunities to become integrated into the labour market not only for their own well-being but also to enhance the production potential of the economy, social cohesion and overall progress. Investment in human capital is a key factor in facilitating transitions from school to work and putting youth on promising career tracks. They are required to be informed about employability choices conforming to the requirements of manufacturing, agriculture and

services sectors. They also need guidance for selecting their career tracks and job searching relevant to the education and training obtained. The Punjab Youth Policy 2012 addresses this very need and aims at establishing a robust and efficient institutional mechanism for implementation of programs through an autonomous body, to be called, the Punjab Youth Development Foundation<sup>4</sup>.

## 6. RECOMMENDATIONS

- i. Establishment of an institutionalized mechanism of Labour Market Information System on permanent basis to provide LMI analyses, build networks of major stakeholders and continuously monitor labour market;
- ii. LMIS is also expected to conduct studies of graduates especially of universities, colleges and TVET institutions, surveys in the catchment areas of TVET institutions about labour market needs and strengthening of links between education and TVET institutions;
- iii. Revival of Employment Exchanges at district level but in a reformed shape with IT-enabled platform mandated with compulsory registration of unemployed as well as employers, national and international NGOs, compulsory notification of vacancies from private sector and government providing vacancy information by occupations/skills;
- iv. Revitalization of Apprenticeship Ordinance with new vision of trades and skill development areas;
- v. Establishment of a coordinating mechanism for stakeholders at the District, Provincial and National Level regarding different institutions involved in employment services/job placement/data generation- Ideally a 3-tier system with horizontal and vertical integration of stakeholders in the arena of Labour Market Information System; and
- vi. Encouragement of private sector/large business concerns/industry groups having in-house training facilities to develop their internal human resource development systems.

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<sup>4</sup> Government of the Punjab

## 7. CONCLUSION

The main objective of LMIS is to develop a comprehensive and well-coordinated institutional mechanism to generate and analyse LMI and provide related services including contributing towards evidence based policy development. The major labour market challenges to be faced over the next five to ten years include assisting vulnerable workers, achieving decent work balance, identifying and addressing implications of societal ageing and unemployment issues. Revitalization of PBS and establishment of LMI & A Unit in 2006 as well as LMI & RC, Punjab in 2011 would lead to formulating a well-developed, synchronized and integrated LMI system in Pakistan. There is, therefore, a need for focused interventions in the field of LMIS in the light of the above recommendations.

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